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Department of Defense Awards Black Hills Corporation the 2015 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award *Employer Earns Nation's Highest Honor for Supporting Guard and Reserve Employees*

WASHINGTON – Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, a Department of Defense office, announced June 25 that Black Hills Corporation of Rapid City, South Dakota, has been awarded the 2015 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award.

Fifteen employers from across the nation received the prestigious award, the nation's highest honor given to employers for exceptional support of National Guard and Reserve employees.

"These outstanding employers have not only earned this award, they have earned this nation's gratitude," said Defense Secretary Ash Carter. "I am truly honored to recognize these 15 organizations for their unwavering support of our military men and women and their families. Their accomplishments are a vital piece of our national defense and a high standard toward which all employers of Guard and Reserve members should strive."

Black Hills Corporation was nominated for the award by Corey Virtue, an employee and Soldier in the South Dakota Army National Guard's 235th Military Police Company.

"Black Hills Corporation is honored to receive a 2015 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award," said David Emery, the chairman, president and chief executive officer of Black Hills Corp. "The members of the National Guard and Reserve sacrifice much while serving and defending our country. As an employer, accommodating their military service is simply the right thing to do."

"Anytime I am doing something with the Guard, my supervisors are always supportive," said Virtue, who deployed to Afghanistan for nearly a year in 2013. "They sent care packages and were always checking up on my wife, who was pregnant with our fifth child, while I was gone."

The Black Hills Corporation earned the award for a number of reasons, including:

- Providing outstanding support to its military employees and their families during military leave.
- Making a yearlong commitment to a service member's family to provide meals or gift cards to local restaurants every Monday during his deployment. The company also helped the service member's family with yard work, childcare and snow removal.
- Providing computers to the National Guard unit to set up an Internet café to enhance communication with service members' families.
- Allowing deployed service members to continue to use their tuition assistance up to \$5,250 per year and the computer loan program.
- Maintaining regular communication with deployed service members through emails, cards and care packages.
- Recognizing military employees for their service and providing support to other military installations, veterans and military support organizations.

“Basically my family knows that Black Hills Corporation is on stand-by if anything goes wrong,” said Virtue. “They are our second family. They make it easy to do what I love on the civilian side, by not taking away from my military career.”

“This award reflects not only on our company's culture, but also on our employees' commitment to service, whether to our country as a member of the military, or to the energy customers and communities we serve,” said Emery.

The 2015 Freedom Award recipients were selected from 2,960 nominations received from Guardsmen and Reservists for going far beyond what the federal law requires to support their military employees. The recipients are named below:

Employer	Location	Nominator's Branch of Service
Black Hills Corporation	Rapid City, SD	Army National Guard
Boise Fire Department	Boise, ID	Marine Corps Reserve
BP America, Inc.	Houston, TX	Army National Guard
Cardinal Health	Dublin, Ohio	Army National Guard
Cigna	Bloomfield, CT	Air National Guard
City of Glendale	Glendale, AZ	Navy Reserve
City of Shawnee	Shawnee, KS	Army Reserve
College of the Ozarks	Point Lookout ,MO	Army National Guard
CVS Health	Woonsocket, RI	Air National Guard
Devon Energy	Oklahoma City, OK	Air National Guard
Dr. Joe A. Jackson, MD, PLLC	Biloxi, MS	Army National Guard
Neil, Dymott, Frank, McFall, Trexler, McCabe & Hudson APLC	San Diego, CA	Navy Reserve
Snell & Wilmer, LLP	Phoenix, AZ	Marine Corps Reserve
Town of Hingham, MA	Hingham, MA	Navy Reserve
Walt Disney Co.	Burbank, CA	Air National Guard

The Freedom Award was instituted in 1996. These outstanding employers join an elite group of 205 previous recipients of the award.

For more information about the Freedom Award and this year's recipients, visit www.FreedomAward.mil.

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